

Public Assistance Usage and Employment Patterns in Utah's Refugee Population



Utah Department of Workforce Services

Workforce Research and Analysis



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Introduction and Data Description

Every year, hundreds of refugees are resettled in Utah and receive assistance from a variety of sources. Among those sources is the Department of Workforce Services (DWS), which provides some form of public assistance and employment services to the majority of refugees. This research seeks to describe the segment of the refugee community in Utah served by DWS.

The data covers refugees who were resettled in Utah and received public assistance from DWS within six months of resettlement. The initial issuance of public assistance occurred between the years 2003 and 2009. For four years after receiving initial assistance from DWS, each individual's public assistance usage, wages, and employment history were analyzed.

In an analysis of employment, age is an important contributing factor to an individual's degree of labor force participation. Full economic participation cannot be reasonably expected from the very young or the very old. The refugee population in Utah is very young, with around 42 percent of refugee DWS customers under the age of 18. And employment for individuals in their late teens and early 20s can be intermittent during what is often a time of furthering education and other activities. With these factors in mind, the ages of refugees in this analysis were limited to 25 to 65 years, resulting in 2,099 individuals.

The Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, publishes annual planned arrival numbers by state. Figure 1 displays the number of refugees who were scheduled for resettlement in Utah along with those who arrived and received a DWS service. ORR numbers show intent for resettlement in a particular destination, not actual arrivals. Refugees who are scheduled to resettle in a specific state could end up staying in a connecting city en route to their planned destination. Or they could leave immediately after arrival, before ever receiving public assistance.

These are some of the reasons that may account for the discrepancies between ORR and DWS numbers. Additionally, DWS arrival numbers in Figure 1 only include those relevant to this study – refugees who received a DWS service within six months of their entry to the state. It excludes any refugee who did not receive services from DWS within six months of entry.

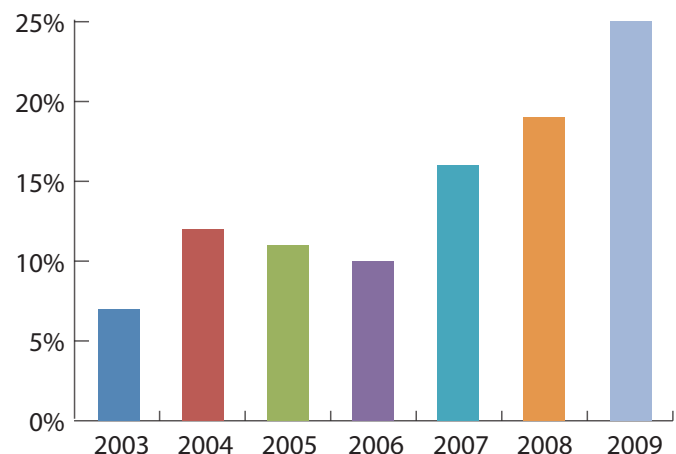
Figure 2 shows the proportion of refugees in this data set by year of first issuance. The numbers of refugees resettling in Utah, and accordingly the rate of issuance of DWS public assistance, accelerated towards the latter years of the time period of interest. For 25 percent of all the refugees who had received some assistance from DWS during the period shown, the initial issuance occurred in 2009.

Figure 1. Refugee Arrivals by Fiscal Year

Fiscal Year	ORR Planned Arrivals	DWS Customer Arrivals
2004	772	637
2005	753	610
2006	671	616
2007	924	911
2008	914	925
2009	1,265	1,148

Source: Refugee Arrival Data, Office of Refugee Resettlement, Administration for Children and Families; Utah Department of Workforce Services

Figure 2. Proportion of Refugees by First Issuance Year



Demographic Description

Refugees who are DWS customers are summarized by various demographic characteristics in Figure 3. The breakdown by age verifies how young the population really is: nearly one-half were within the ages of 25 and 35. The majority were married. And the country of origin with the largest number of in-migrant refugees during this time period was Iraq. Country of origin was undisclosed for a large number of refugees in the data set. Figure 3 displays only disclosed countries of origin.

Figure 3. Demographic Description of DWS Refugee Customers

	Number of Refugees	Percent of Refugees
Age		
25–35	997	47%
36–45	616	29%
46–55	329	16%
56–65	157	7%
Marital Status		
Married	1,359	65%
Never Married	524	25%
Divorced	44	2%
Separated	65	3%
Widowed	72	3%
Country of Origin		
Afghanistan	15	2%
Cambodia	6	1%
Cuba	130	17%
Ethiopia	24	3%
Former Soviet Union Countries	165	21%
Former Yugoslavia	7	1%
Hmong	1	0%
Iran	82	11%
Iraq	243	31%
Laos	4	0%
Poland	1	0%
Somalia	85	11%
Vietnam	11	1%
Gender		
Male	1,119	53%

(Table continued on page 3)

	Number of Refugees	Percent of Refugees
Female	980	47%
Year Entry		
2003	153	7%
2004	254	12%
2005	250	12%
2006	206	10%
2007	312	15%
2008	417	20%
2009	499	24%
Overall Total	2,099	

(Figure 3 continued)

Public Assistance Usage

Refugees can access a number of public assistance programs through DWS. The public assistance programs that are included in this study are the following:

- Food Stamps
- Medical
- Child Care
- Unemployment Insurance
- Financial, which includes the Family Employment Program, Refugee Cash Assistance and General Assistance Cash Program

While a refugee could have gone six months without public assistance after resettling in Utah and still be included in this analysis, the majority received some form of public assistance much sooner after arrival. Figure 4 displays the number of days between entry into Utah and first issuance of any public assistance measure from DWS. On average, refugees received their first issuance of public assistance from DWS 22 days after entry into Utah.

Figure 4. Length of Time between Entry and Public Assistance Issuance

Days Between Entry and Public Assistance Issuance	
Age	
25–35	24
36–45	23
46–55	22
56–65	9
Marital Status	
Married	23
Never Married	22
Divorced	21
Separated	18
Widowed	14
Country of Origin	
Afghanistan	20
Cambodia	6
Cuba	20

(Table continued on page 4)

Days Between Entry and Public Assistance Issuance	
Ethiopia	34
Former Soviet Union Countries	23
Former Yugoslavia	17
Hmong	0
Iran	26
Iraq	21
Laos	10
Poland	30
Somalia	24
Vietnam	26
Gender	
Male	23
Female	22
Year Entry	
2003	17
2004	20
2005	24
2006	21
2007	23
2008	28
2009	17
Overall Average	22

Figures 5 and 6 plot the average number of months of all public assistance usage during the four years after entry into the state along with the average of all wages (in-state and out-of-state). During those four years, a refugee could have potentially received 48 months of public assistance from each of the programs listed above, or 240 overlapping months if taking each program individually. For each program, the number of months a refugee received assistance was summed. The total number of months of public assistance is the total across all of the different programs. Rather than merely tally the number of months that any public assistance was received, this method shows the degree of public assistance usage across programs more clearly since receiving assistance from more than one program in the same month is counted differently than receiving just one form of public assistance in that month.

The bubbles in Figure 5 represent different countries of origin, while in Figure 6, the bubbles represent marital status. The size of a bubble indicates the number of refugees in the category represented by that bubble.

Figure 5. Plot of Average Public Assistance Usage and Average Four-Year Wages by Country of Origin

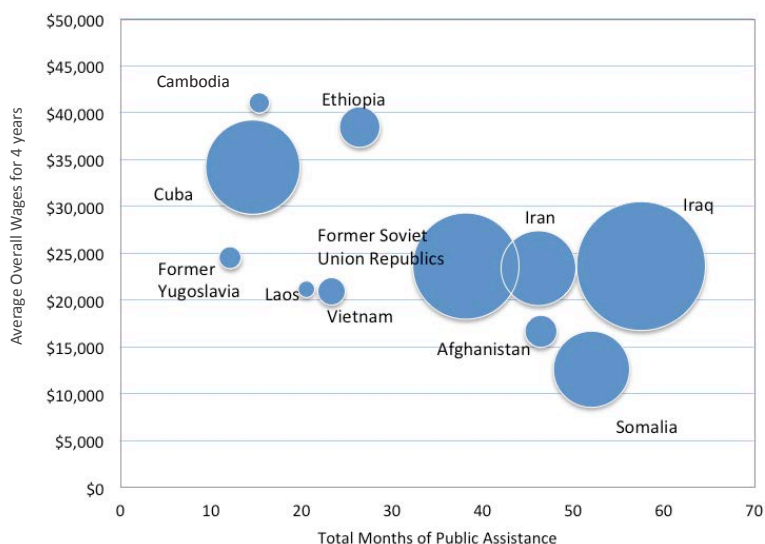
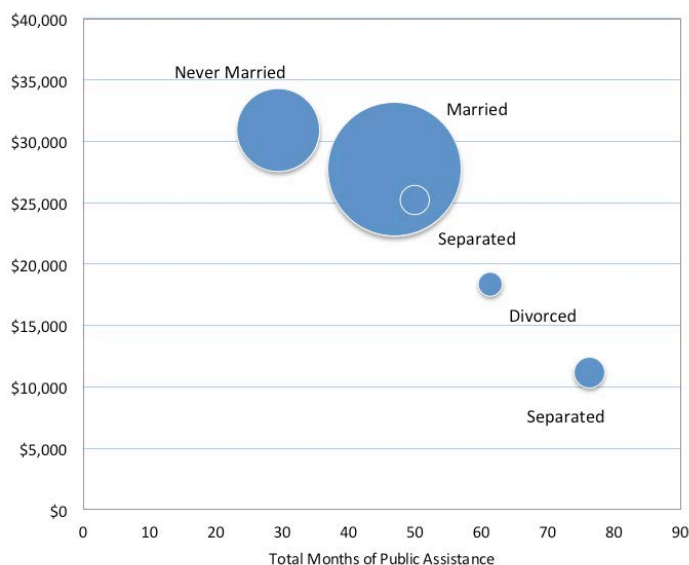


Figure 5 only includes refugees with a disclosed country of origin. The four-year average of all wages was approximately \$24,500. During the same time period, refugees received an average of 42 months of public assistance. Refugees with the highest wages originated from Cambodia, Ethiopia, and Cuba. Consistently, these are also the groups with the lowest rates of public assistance usage.

Figure 5

- Average overall four-year wage was \$24,000
- Average months of public assistance usage was 42 months

Figure 6. Plot of Average Public Assistance Usage and Average Four-Year Wages by Marital Status



This plot only includes refugees with a disclosed marital status. The four-year average of all wages was \$27,600. During the same time period, refugees received an average of 44 months of public assistance. The highest average levels of public assistance were received by divorced and separated refugees, while those who had never married used the lowest average levels. They also had the highest wages during this period.

Figure 6

- Average overall four-year wage was \$27,600
- Average months of public assistance usage was 44 months

Public Assistance Usage: Food Stamps

This section highlights usage of the Supplement Nutritional Assistance Program by refugees, commonly referred to as food stamps. Figure 7 shows the percent of individuals receiving food stamps by year of first public assistance issuance and years of settlement. Nearly all entrants to the state received food stamps during their first year after resettlement. During the first few years of this time period, food stamps usage generally tapered off by the fourth year. This trend changed for those refugees who entered during or just before the recession, whose food stamps usage persisted longer. The most persistent usage is for refugees who first received public assistance in 2008; by the fourth year, almost 60 percent were still receiving food stamps.

Figure 7. Average Number of Months Receiving Food Stamps during First Four Years

Year of First Issuance	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
2003	100%	41%	33%	27%
2004	99%	58%	41%	34%
2005	98%	46%	39%	38%
2006	100%	55%	37%	40%
2007	100%	68%	61%	56%
2008	100%	70%	65%	59%
2009	100%	74%	62%	54%

Figure 8. Average Number of Months Receiving Food Stamps during the First Four Years

Average Number of Months	
Age	
25–35	23
36–45	25
46–55	28
56–65	31
Marital Status	
Married	27
Never Married	17
Divorced	27
Separated	25
Widowed	35
Country of Origin	
Afghanistan	26
Cambodia	10
Cuba	10
Ethiopia	16
Former Soviet Union Countries	24
Former Yugoslavia	8
Hmong	7
Iran	28
Iraq	30
Laos	15
Poland	1
Somalia	25
Vietnam	16
Gender	
Male	22
Female	28
Year Entry	
2003	18
2004	22
2005	19
2006	20
2007	27
2008	29
2009	30
Overall Average	25

Figure 8 provides food stamps usage by demographic characteristics. The number of months in which food stamps were received during the four years after entry is averaged by groups. The table indicates that as age increases, the expected degree of food stamps usage also increases. An analysis by marital status reveals married and widowed refugees with the highest usage patterns. And refugees who originated from Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan demonstrated the highest levels of usage by country of origin.

Even though the greatest number of chronic recipients of food stamps were between the ages 25 and 35 (Figure 9), the average overall number of months of food stamps received by this age group was not higher than other groups due to the immense size of this age group, as demonstrated in Figure 3. In other words, the chronic recipients of food stamps were still a relatively small proportion of the 997 refugees in the 25 through 35 years age group.

Chronic Recipients

A total of 255 refugees, termed chronic recipients in this report, received food stamps during each of the 48 month after resettling in Utah. Figure 9 breaks down the numbers by demographic characteristics and by proportion within groups.

Chronic recipients tend to be young and married. Refugees from Iraq comprise the largest proportion of any disclosed country of origin. The majority of chronic recipients entered the state during the recessionary years of 2007 through 2009.

**Figure 9. Average Number of Months Receiving Food Stamps
during First Four Years by Various Demographics**

	Number of Refugees	Percent of Chronic Recipients
Age		
25-35	109	43%
36-45	81	32%
46-55	51	20%
56-65	14	5%
Marital Status		
Married	203	80%
Never Married	23	9%
Divorced	6	2%
Separated	5	2%
Widowed	13	5%
Country of Origin		
Afghanistan	2	2%
Ethiopia	2	2%
Former Soviet Union Countries	20	19%
Iran	10	10%
Iraq	53	50%
Somalia	18	17%
Gender		
Male	110	43%
Female	145	57%
Year Entry		
2003	10	4%
2004	18	7%
2005	23	9%
2006	19	7%
2007	51	20%
2008	56	22%
2009	78	31%
Overall Total	255	

Wages and Employment in Utah

While rates of public assistance usage can be prevalent in the refugee population, at some point most refugees in this data set entered formal employment. Employment-minded refugees can choose to remain in the state and enter the Utah labor force or emigrate from Utah to live and work elsewhere. The wages and employment analysis in this section describe the in-state economic outcomes of refugees during the four years after their initial public assistance issuance. Though individuals included in this analysis could have eventually left the state, everyone had worked at least one quarter in Utah.

The share of refugees who entered formal employment during the same quarter as their initial public assistance issuance was nearly 12 percent. But on average, it took individuals about 4 quarters to gain employment after the initial public assistance issuance (Figure 11). At some point during the four years analyzed, 67 percent of refugees in this data set worked in Utah.

The most rapid entry into the labor force was by single, young males. This demographic was also among the most likely to have worked in Utah. In contrast, widowed and divorced refugees and those over the age of 55 were highly unlikely to have had employment in Utah.

Figure 10. Industries of Utah Employment by Number of Quarters Worked

Industry	Number of Quarters	Percent
Food Manufacturing	1,982	13%
Administrative and Support Services	1,725	11%
Accommodation	1,445	9%
Food Services and Drinking Places	1,199	8%
Social Assistance	1,103	7%
General Merchandise Store	848	6%
Educational Services	835	5%
All Other	6,263	41%
Total	15,400	

Employment for refugees was clustered around a few key industries, as shown in Figure 10. This table gives the broad industry sectors. Below is a breakdown of the most common detailed industries within each sector.

Food Manufacturing

Animal slaughtering and processing

Administrative and Support Services

Employment services

Accommodation

Traveler accommodation

Food Services and Drinking Places

Full-service restaurants and limited-service eating places

Special food services

Social Assistance

Individual and family services

Community food and housing, and emergency and other relief services

Educational Services

Colleges, universities, and professional schools

Elementary and secondary schools

Figure 11. In-State Employment During First Four Years

	Quarters between Public Assistance Issuance and Employment in Utah	Quarters of Employment in Utah	Percent with No Employment in Utah
Age			
25-35	3.7	7	25%
36-45	3.8	7	28%
46-55	4.7	4	48%
56-65	4.5	2	76%
Marital Status			
Married	4.1	6	31%
Never Married	2.9	6	33%
Divorced	4.0	4	55%
Separated	3.9	6	29%
Widowed	6.7	3	57%
Country of Origin			
Afghanistan	6.0	4	67%
Cambodia	1.8	7	33%
Cuba	1.3	7	26%
Ethiopia	2.0	9	33%
Former Soviet Union Republics	3.1	5	32%
Former Yugoslavia	7.8	4	57%
Hmong	1.0	2	-
Iran	5.2	6	34%
Iraq	3.6	5	43%
Laos	1.0	6	50%
Poland	-	0	-
Somalia	4.6	4	49%
Vietnam	5.6	4	64%
Gender			
Male	2.5	4	23%
Female	5.9	8	45%
Year Entry			
2003	4.9	6	42%
2004	3.6	6	33%
2005	2.1	7	27%
2006	2.3	7	25%
2007	4.2	6	29%
2008	4.5	6	36%
2009	4.6	5	38%
Overall Average	3.9	6	33%

Out Migration

Not all refugees who resettled in Utah made the state their ultimate home. Every year, a percentage left, migrating to other states for work and other reasons. Determining which refugees have left the state is very difficult and data sources are limited. For the purposes of this report, refugees are considered to have left the state when they have out-of-state wages recorded in the U.S. Department of Labor's national database called the Wage Record Interchange System. This approach has its shortcomings, namely that a refugee who moved out of Utah but did not commence out-of-state employment would not be included in this system. This creates the potential for underrating the number of refugees who moved and that potential should be taken into consideration.

This portion of the analysis compares "relocators," those refugees who found out-of-state employment within four years after resettlement in Utah; to "settlers," those who resettled in Utah and had no out-of-state employment within four years. Relocators could have worked in Utah before leaving. Incidentally, not all settlers were employed in Utah.

As Figure 12 shows, those who relocated outside of Utah were more likely to be married. Those who stayed were more likely to be single and slightly more likely to be female.

Figure 12. Demographic Description of Relocators Compared to Settlers

	Relocators	Settlers
Percent of Total	7%	93%
Average Age	38 Years	38 Years
Percent Female	45%	47%
Marital Status		
Married	72%	64%
Never Married	11%	26%
Divorced	4%	2%
Separated	7%	3%
Widowed	5%	3%

Figure 13. Length of Time between Initial Public Assistance Issuance and Out-of-State Wages

Quarters Between Public Assistance Issuance and Out-of State Wages of Relocators	
Age	
25-35	7.7
36-45	8.4
46-55	7.7
56-65	7.2
Marital Status	
Married	7.5
Never Married	8.2
Divorced	8.8
Separated	8.8
Widowed	11.9
Country of Origin	
Afghanistan	13.0
Cuba	6.4
Ethiopia	13.0
Former Soviet Union Republics	8.3
Iran	12.0
Iraq	7.2
Somalia	9.4
Undisclosed Countries	7.8
Gender	
Male	6.6
Female	9.4
Year Entry	
2003	11.4
2004	9.3
2005	7.4
2006	8.3
2007	8.4
2008	4.9
2009	9.3
Overall Average	7.9

Figure 13 displays the number of quarters between initial public assistance issuance and the out-of-state wages of relocators. At around the beginning of third year, or 7.9 quarters after the first issuance of public assistance, was when the average relocator became employed out-of-state. The group which earned out-of-state employment the soonest was married males over 55 years. Those of Cuban origin tended to earn out-of-state wages sooner than any other nationality.

When refugees who had been resettled in Utah left the state for work, Texas and Minnesota were top destinations (Figure 14). Out-of-state employment in any state is usually concentrated around a few industries. Those industries are itemized in Figure 15.

Figure 14. Top States for Refugee Out-Migration from Utah by Number of Quarters Employed

State	Number of Quarters Employed
Texas	669
Minnesota	631
Iowa	422
Florida	400
California	288
Nebraska	250
Arizona	233
New York	233
Colorado	228
Pennsylvania	213
Washington	198
Kentucky	187
Nevada	166
Illinois	148
South Dakota	135
Michigan	131
Ohio	109
All Other States	1,112

Figure 15. Top Five Detailed Industries by Top States of Out-Migration from Utah

State	Detailed Industries
Texas	Animal Slaughtering and Processing
	Employment Services
	Full Service Restaurants and Limited Service Eating Places
	Grocery Stores
	Services to Buildings and Dwellings
Minnesota	Employment Services
	Animal Slaughtering and Processing
	Home Health Care Services
	Individual and Family Services
	Department Stores
Iowa	Animal Slaughtering and Processing
	Employment Services
	Services to Buildings and Dwellings
	Business Support Services
	Motor Vehicle Parts Manufacturing
Florida	Full Service Restaurants and Limited Service Eating Places
	Services to Buildings and Dwellings
	Employment Services
	Home Health Care Services
	Temporary Help Services
California	Limited Service Eating Places
	Employment Services
	Support Activities for Crops Production
	Building Equipment Contractors
	Management, Scientific, and Technical Consulting Services
Nebraska	Animal Slaughtering and Processing
	Child Day Care Services
	General Freight Trucking
	Automotive Repair and Maintenance
	General Medical and Surgical Hospitals

Settler Wages by Gender and Marital Status

We examined the wages of the “settlers,” those refugees who settled in Utah and had not earned any wages outside of the state four years later. The figures below display settlers’ wages during each of those four years by gender and marital status.

In this analysis, wages are measured by year. A year is four consecutive quarters and the first year is considered to be the first four quarters of a refugee’s resettlement in Utah. If an individual arrived in 2003Q1, for example, that individual’s first year is considered to be 2003Q1 through 2003Q4. Similarly, the first year of a refugee who arrived in 2003Q2 is 2003Q2 through 2004Q1. When comparing economic factors by year, the first year of both individuals will be treated in the same way, and the average of all of the refugees’ first year data will comprise the overall average economic outcome of the first year.

Since the data and methodology limitations created the potential for underrated counts of relocators, the number of settlers might be inexact and too high. If refugees moved out of Utah and did not commence any out-of-state employment, it would be difficult to identify their departure from Utah. Thus, they would continue to be grouped together with settlers, potentially dampening the average economic outcomes of this group.

Female settlers regularly earned lower wages during the first four years (Figure 16). Both genders experienced consistently rising wage levels even though wage levels remain relatively low.

Figures 17 and 18 compare wages by gender and marital status. The wage levels of never-married male settlers were initially higher than their married counterparts, but wage levels for both groups practically converged by the fourth year. For never-married female settlers, wages remained higher than their married counterparts during each of the four years, even while their wage level declined in the fourth year.

Figure 16. Settler Wages by Gender and Year

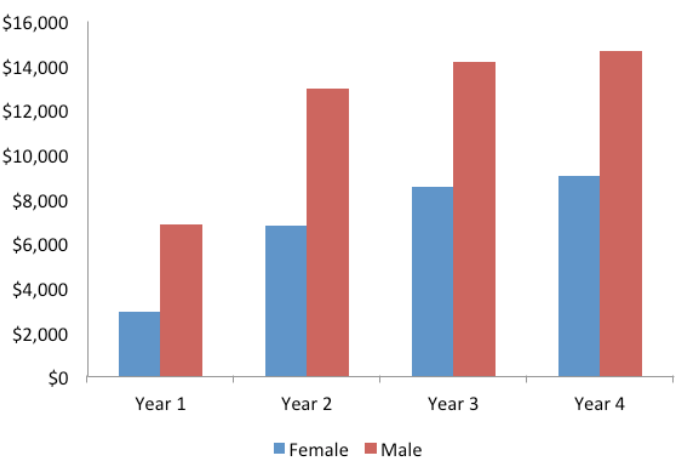


Figure 17. Married Settler Wages by Gender and Year

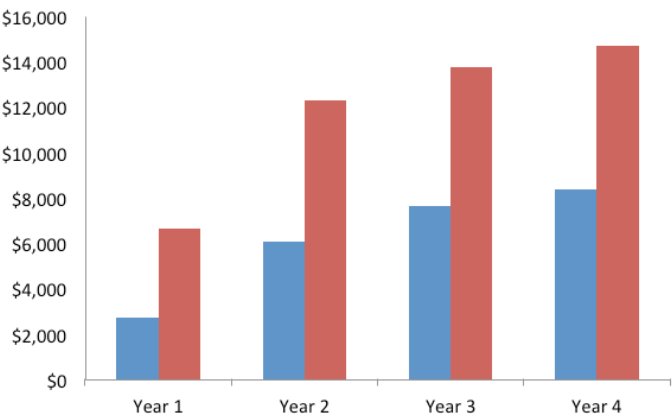
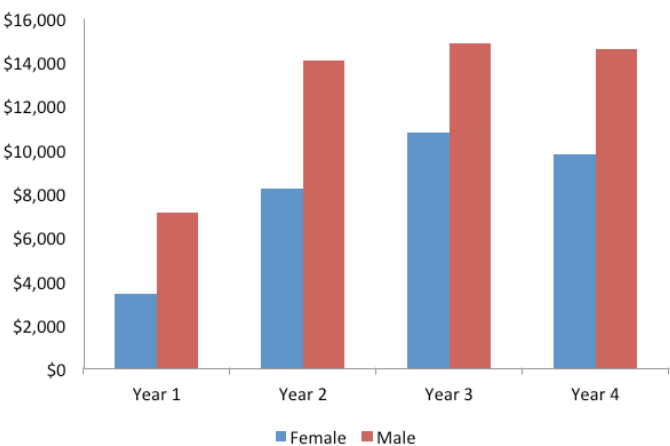


Figure 18. Never Married Settler Wages by Gender and Year



The Role of the Recession

Figure 19. In- and Out-of-State Wages by Year

Date Entry	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Total All Four Years
2003	\$8,475	\$12,997	\$15,295	\$18,901	\$55,668
2004	6,140	10,637	14,070	15,707	46,554
2005	7,978	14,943	18,285	18,330	59,536
2006	8,700	14,861	16,222	16,369	56,152
2007	9,116	15,042	14,768	15,799	54,724
2008	8,732	14,492	15,995	17,869	57,088
2009	6,430	12,314	14,506	16,571	49,820

Figure 20. In- and Out-of-State Employment Rate by Year

Date Entry	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Average All Four Years
2003	43%	48%	46%	40%	44%
2004	45%	47%	53%	50%	49%
2005	60%	63%	57%	55%	59%
2006	60%	65%	56%	43%	56%
2007	47%	53%	54%	54%	52%
2008	39%	49%	54%	54%	49%
2009	37%	47%	52%	51%	47%

A large proportion of refugees entered the state during the Great Recession, which spanned from December 2007 to June 2009. The dampened economy of the state impacted many workers who were unable to find or keep employment. No doubt this also had an effect even on the refugee community. Wages and employment rates for refugees demonstrate the difficulty in commencing or maintaining employment during the recessionary period. Figures 19 and 20 show weakened outcomes during that period. The analysis includes refugees who were employed for at least one quarter in a given year.

Total wages and overall average employment rates were highest for refugees who entered Utah in 2005. Even during the recession, their experience was not as negative as those who entered the state in later

years. Perhaps having a few years of opportunity for employment provided a more stable foundation that was not as easily impacted during the recession.

The worst time to enter was in 2009, during the depths of the recession and later its aftermath. Total four-year wages of refugees who entered in 2009 were the lowest they had been in five years. And employment rates were diminished as well. As with wages, employment rates remained relatively steady for refugees who had some years of employment before the onset of the recession.